

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is eligible?

- Children 5-19 years of age, who are not yet in college.
- Youth older than 19, but still in high school, are eligible.

When is the deadline?

- Each year, United States entries must be postmarked by February 15th and received by February 22nd.
- International entries must be received by March 1st.
- Entries can be mailed in throughout the year; any entries received after the deadline will be automatically held for the next year's contest.

Is there an entry fee?

- No, the contest is free to enter.

May I submit more than one piece?

- Yes. You may submit as many poems and/or pieces of artwork as you wish (including poem/art combinations). **However, each entry must have a separate entry form.**

How do I enter?

- You may enter the contest through your school, environmental club, scout troop, art organization, or any other such group, or you may enter the contest on your own. Group entries should be sent to River of Words together in one envelope or package, rather than individually. All entries must be sent to us with a complete entry form, and should be sent to:

River of Words
P.O. Box 4000-J
Berkeley, CA 94704 USA

Am I entering as an individual or part of a group?

- If you completed your River of Works entry through work with a class, scout troop, nature center, 4-H club, youth organization or other club, then you are entering as part of a group. ***Individual work should still be marked as a group entry if it was completed through participation in a class assignment or group project.***
- River of Words will mail group entrants' "Watershed Explorer Certificates" in one package to one address (school or scout troop or 4H leader's home, for example) for distribution.
- If you are entering the contest on your own, (i.e., you did not do your work through participation in a class assignment or group project) then you are entering as an individual. You will receive your "Watershed Explorer Certificate" at your home address.

How should I prepare my entry?

- Written poems should be no longer than 32 lines in length, and should be typed or neatly printed in ink (pencil does not photocopy). Please staple your poem to your entry form back to back so that each piece faces out. Remember, each poem you submit requires its own entry form!
- American Sign Language poems should be recorded on VHS videotape; each poem should be no longer than 3 minutes in length. Please sign your full name and poem title (if it has one) at the beginning of your poem. A summary of the poem's content should be typed or printed neatly in ink, and stapled to your entry form. Remember, each poem you submit requires its own entry form!
- Artwork should be no larger than 11 inches by 17 inches and should not be framed, matted, laminated or folded. If using charcoal or pastels, please remember to "fix" your artwork before sending. Please affix your entry form to the back of your artwork, using tape or glue. Do not use staples, paperclips, or any glue that could seep through and damage your artwork! Remember, each piece of artwork that you submit requires its own entry form!

How should I attach my entry form to my artwork?

- For written poetry entries, please staple the entry form to your poem back to back, so that each piece faces out (in other words, after they are stapled together, your poem should show on one side and when you flip it over, the front of the entry form should show on the other side).
- For videotaped poems (performed in ASL), please include all entry forms of students who appear on the tape in the same package. If other entries (written poetry or artwork) are being sent to River of Words in the same package, please place all ASL entry forms together in an envelope and label them as ASL entry forms. Also, please remember to staple a short summary of the poem's content to the entry form.
- For artwork, please affix your entry form to the back of your artwork with tape or glue. If using glue, be careful to use a glue that will not seep through and damage your artwork. Please, do not staple or paperclip entry forms to the back of your artwork!

Remember, for each poem or piece of artwork that you submit, you need to complete a separate entry form – thanks!

Where can I get entry forms?

- You may download an entry form from the River of Words website: www.riverofwords.org or you may request one to be sent to you via mail, email or fax by contacting the River of Words office.

River of Words

P.O. Box 4000-J
Berkeley, CA 94704 USA

Phone: 510-548-POEM (7636)

Fax: 510-548-2095

Email: info@riverofwords.org

Is work returned?

- No. However, by pre-arrangement, submissions from an entire state can be returned to one address (except for the Grand Prize or Finalist artwork; in the case of winning artwork, high quality color reproductions will be returned instead). In states with a ROW State

Coordinator, entries are returned to the coordinator. Many states award state-level ROW prizes as well.

Who sponsors River of Words?

- ROW is a non-profit educational organization, incorporated in the State of California. We are supported by grants from foundations and donations from individuals, businesses, and government agencies, like the Environmental Protection Agency. We are affiliated with the Library of Congress Center for the Book, the Library's literacy promotion division, which hosts our Award Ceremony and Luncheon each year, as well as a Teacher Training Workshop.

What prizes are awarded?

National:

- Four Grand Prizes in Poetry, one in each of the four age categories:
 - Category I: Kindergarten – Grade 2
 - Category II: Grade 3 - Grade 6
 - Category III: Grade 7 – Grade 9
 - Category IV: Grade 10 – Grade 12
- Four Grand Prizes in Art, one in each of the four age categories (same as above).

International:

- One Grand Prize winner, in art or poetry, any age category.

Regional:

- Shasta Bioregion Award Winner (Northern California, one winner only, in art or poetry, any age category).
- Anacostia Watershed Award Winner (Washington, DC area, one winner only, in art or poetry, any age category).

Finalist:

- About 50 finalists total, in art and poetry combined—the exact number of finalists selected each year varies depending on the number and quality of submissions.

Teacher of the Year:

- One winner. There is no formal nominating procedure, but if there is a teacher you think we should know about (including yourself) please let us know.

The eight national grand prize winners, one international winner, and the Teacher of the Year win a trip to Washington, DC with a parent or guardian. They are honored at an Award Ceremony and Luncheon at the Library of Congress, have a VIP tour of the White House, go on a canoe trip and visit many historical sites.

Regional winners and finalists receive prizes of books and art supplies.

*River of Words reserves the right **not** to award a Grand Prize winner in any of the above categories if no entry merits such designation.*

Are entries acknowledged?

- Yes. Everyone who enters will receive a personalized Watershed Explorer Certificate, suitable for framing. A list of winners is sent to those who enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope with 55¢ postage with their entries.

What ROW resources are there?

- River of Words produces and distributes curriculum materials, community partnership resources and children's art and poetry.
- River of Words also conducts Educators' Workshops at various locations throughout the year. For upcoming workshops, visit the Educator's page on our website.

Who judges the work?

- Poetry: Former U.S. Poet Laureate (1995-1997) and ROW co-founder, Robert Hass.
- Art: Thacher Hurd
- Spanish Poetry: John Oliver Simon and Francisco X. Alarcon
- ASL Poetry: Ella Mae Zentz and Susan Rutherford

For Teachers:

How do I begin ROWing?

- Read the River of Words' Educator's Guide. It contains lots of background material on watershed science and how to teach poetry to children. You'll also find a bibliography and resource

guide, as well as classroom and field activities designed to help children explore their communities and their imaginations.

- Read through the River of Words Contest Rules & Guidelines, which contain specifics about entering, artwork size, poem length, etc.
- Check our State Coordinator's page to see if your state has a ROW Coordinator. If so contact them for ideas and information.
- Contact local water or park districts, museums, conservation and arts organizations to see if they have any resources you can use: naturalists, poets, artists, videos, maps, etc. (One of the most successful and creative uses of River of Words that we've heard about was in Mill Valley, California, where an elementary school teacher took her students to a senior citizens' home that was situated alongside a small urban creek. The seniors talked to the children about what the area was like when they were children and together they explored the creek. The subsequent poems and artwork so inspired the seniors that they invited the kids and their families to return to the center, where they read them poems *they* had written in response to the children's poems. This project has turned into an ongoing oral history and creative writing project and has connected the school and the senior center in ways that are lasting and profound).
- If you are school-based, try to involve other teachers in River of Words. Collaborations between science, language arts, social studies, and art teachers have been very successful in many schools and have not only produced wonderful poems and paintings, but have lead to community service projects like stream cleanups and school gardens. Aside from the obvious benefit of shared ideas and workloads that cooperation allows, a group effort seems to energize students about the project as well.
- River of Words is designed as a vehicle for building community partnerships. It is an opportunity to involve parents, service groups, local business, the media and other community resources in a common goal. While such partnerships are not essential to an effective ROW project, giving students' work and concerns a wider audience can engage them more fully in the process.
- If possible, get outdoors, even if it's only the schoolyard. Utilize field activities that encourage careful observation, data recording, sketching, listening, etc. Repeated visits to the same site allow students to observe changes. Many teachers incorporate a

“service learning” component in their ROW projects, like water quality monitoring, tree planting, gardening or creek clean-up.

- We call our curriculum approach “Watershed *Explorer*” for a reason—join your students in the fun of discovering more about the place you live.

Fishing The Soul

The river comes alive at a flick of the wrist,
A smooth motion takes control of everything,
The layer between two worlds is peeled back,
A mayfly speaks as the go-between,
The motion once again takes control,
With more meaning than the first,
There is a sensation different from before,
Like having confidence in the river itself,
The mayfly returns,
And quietly settles back down,
This time in now familiar territory,
The motion has stopped,
Drifting as an image in the clouds,
The mayfly leaves recognizable waters,
Carefully and without song,
The motion calls again,
A familiar rhythm returns and restores order,
Just to be broken once more by the calling of the water.

--Matthew Sparks